

## **House Families, Children, and Seniors Committee**

2/15/11

Good morning, my name is Kadi Janssen, and I am the Policy Analyst for the Michigan Federation for Children and Families. I am here today filling in for the Federation's Executive Director, Janet Reynolds Snyder. Joining me today is the Federation Board President, Gary Tester, who will also speak to his work at Starr Commonwealth, a Federation member agency.

Chairman Kurtz, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you and your committee members about the private nonprofit agencies represented by the Michigan Federation for Children and Families. I will also speak to the challenges and opportunities facing Michigan's child welfare system.

Your commitment to the most vulnerable children of Michigan has never been more important as our state's child welfare system is undergoing a critical reform process. The decisions made on a daily basis by this committee and others directly impact the lives of children and their families.

The Michigan Federation for Children and Families is a membership association of private, nonprofit child and family serving agencies located throughout the entire state of Michigan.

Our member agencies provide a wide array of services in all 83 counties of the state to the families in your districts. The Federation's 43 member agencies provide family preservation services, foster care, adoption, and residential care. The Federation's member agencies are pleased to work in collaboration with the Michigan Department of Human Services to provide these vital services.

To fulfill the state's responsibility to provide for the protection, care and supervision of children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect, DHS enlists the expertise and resources of numerous licensed and accredited private agencies throughout the state. This partnership with DHS is long-standing and critical to serving the needs of vulnerable children and families.

Through contracts with the state, currently Federation member agencies deliver nearly 70% of the direct service to children in licensed out-of-home foster care placements, and more than 90% of residential treatment services.

As you may be aware, last year the State of Michigan was awarded \$3.5 million dollars by the United States Department of Health and Human Services in recognition of the greatest number of adoptions finalized in our state's history! This effort was in great partnership with DHS, and largely due to private agency efforts, as more than 70% of this record number of adoptions were completed by private agencies.

Private agencies look forward to the opportunity for further collaboration with the Department to exceed this number of adoptions this year, with the goal of becoming a national model of excellence in child welfare by keeping children safe and moving them to permanency in record time.

A strong partnership between the public and private sectors is critical to this state's achievement of appropriate goals for service. Major challenges for Michigan include meeting the federal Child and Family Services Review standards, implementation of the Child Welfare Improvement Task Force recommendations, and meeting the mandates of the *Dwayne B. v. Granholm* consent decree.

The consent decree was officially entered into in October of 2008, and brings focus to a historic moment in the State of Michigan when it was declared that slow means of child welfare change is simply no longer acceptable. The public and private sector must work together aggressively in order to meet the demands of the consent decree. Most importantly, the decree is a blueprint for meaningful child welfare system improvements that have already begun to, and will further result, in better lives for children in Michigan.

These challenges of meeting the decree requirements are amplified by Michigan's economic struggles, which have increased the service need at the same time the state budget deficits have prompted cuts to services, and mandated reform adds cost for private agencies.

Private agencies are equally held accountable for meeting the standards of reform outlined in the consent decree, including reduced caseload sizes, increased supervision of staff, and

additional training and service delivery mandates, all components which require financial resources to implement.

The consent decree provides a tremendous opportunity for necessary reform and, of course, requires those who have dedicated their lives to the service of children and families to be a part of the solution.

The legislature can support these efforts through policy and appropriation to insure that both the public and private sectors have the resources critical to implementation, and ultimately, success of meeting the consent decree's requirements.

Federation member agencies are devoted to protecting children and strengthening communities by providing the most cost-effective and quality services possible. It will be critical over the next term that the policy decisions of this committee and the full legislature support creative solutions to issues our state's child welfare system faces.

The private agencies represented through the Michigan Federation for Children and Families are dedicated to working with the Michigan Department of Human Services and the Michigan Legislature to continue improving our system, and making it one that serves children and families with the highest level of quality and respect.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in front of you today, and I am of course more than happy to answer any questions you may have.

